

Four Virtual Haiku Poets



Scott Terrill
Brendan Slater
Colin Stewart Jones
Michael Goglia

Edited by
Alan Summers & Brendan Slater

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Cage Fighting

A Foreword to Four Virtual Haiku Poets by Alan Summers

"Gritty, experimental, human and readable for a mainstream audience." — Brendan Slater

The poem, in all its forms, perhaps, to paraphrase Ian Sansom - *frequent contributor and critic for The Guardian and the London Review of Books* - remains a most elusive thing. One minute you think you have it pinned down, and the next it's moved, both geographically, and in its mode of transport. If you thought you knew everything about haiku poetry, here's an exploration into other styles and approaches.

What of short verse, and in particular, haiku and other aspects of haikai literature in the fledgling 21st century?

This book covers three geographic locations, those of Britain, America and Australia, and poetry that's an excitement of language yet still contained in tight cages called haiku. That's what we are invited here to see, "the where and how of poets" contained in tight enclosures. I want the reader in me to have these four poets excite me in their approach *to poetry, to language, to words, and to their audience*, while all the while using the constrained framework of haiku.

These poems offer up possibilities for the many aspects of existence that we embrace or fail to embrace, or should not embrace. These may be poems living on, or off the edge, perhaps always living too dangerously close to the flame, but we need only read them, and back off, and then become relieved we are not in their universe of existence,

and then revisit them with the shock of strong black coffee, or a splash of cold water.

How do we enter into conversation with these poets, or is a poem an argument? What are the basic intentions on offer that are indispensable to compose these poems?

Fill [...] the granaries of your skull with all kinds of words, necessary, expressive, rare, invented, renovated and manufactured. Equipment [like a] pen, a pencil, [...] an outfit for your visits to the doss-house [...] an umbrella for writing in the rain, a room measuring the exact number of paces you have to take when you're working...

Vladimir Mayakovsky, *How Are Verses Made?* (1926), tr. G.M. Hyde

Haiku are often the sum, and beyond the sum, of two parts, this is what William Empson has to say:

Two statements are made as if they are connected, and the reader is forced to consider their relations for himself. The reasons why these facts should have been selected for a poem is left for him to invent; he will invent a variety of reasons and order them in his mind. This, I think, is the essential fact about the poetical use of language. William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930)

Ian Sansom responded to this with *The poet invents. But the reader invents also.*

And Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) the founder of "deconstruction" maybe replies that with poets, they will "...always dream of a pen that would be a syringe." And "if this work seems so threatening, this is because it isn't simply eccentric or strange, but competent, rigorously argued, and carrying conviction" Derrida often talks of the way words tremble, the moments when the differing

meanings and possibilities of a word are released, and appears to form the core of these poets, and their need to release these words out to the readers.

Derrida writes: *"We tremble in that strange repetition that ties an irrefutable past (a shock has been felt, a traumatism has already affected us) to a future that cannot be anticipated; anticipated but unpredictable; apprehended, but, and this is why there is a future, apprehended precisely as unforeseeable, unpredictable; approached as unapproachable. Even if one thinks one knows what is going to happen, the new instant of that happening remains untouched, still inaccessible, in fact unlivable."*

Ouijamiflip, Nicholas Royle, Oxford Literary Review. Vol. 30, Page 235-256, ISSN 0305-1498 (2008)

These poets tremble, but also chip at the 'ice-block quality' in Picasso, and...*as a painter [they] must have pigments or shades more numerous than the existing names of the colours* [Ezra Pound, Vorticism, in Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir (1916)], they need to create in a new environment, with new tools:

rusted tools
on the wall
a plumber's day dream

Goglia's verse has the plumber moving to new places, which is a risk, as his or her job is perceived all wrapped up in a certain approach, but there are always new ways being invented, to be taken up and explored.

Welcome to where poetry isn't a truth serum, and where the poets don't buy pictures in the normal sense.

Brendan Slater's haiku is one example:

she called for a shot of Narcan __/_spring morning

This could suggest the vital signs monitor in a hospital, possibly as she spikes back into life. /\ also means house in early writing, and in fact, in Chinese, a woman under a roof is one of the characters which can be used to mean 'peace' with the resulting character standing for concepts such as 'home' or 'family'. Needle precision is a watchword these writers attempt to live by in their writing.

Exponentiation is also something both Slater, and all these writers experiment with, and it's a system used pervasively in many other fields, so why not poetry? In fact Public-key cryptography refers to a cryptographic system requiring two separate keys, one of which is secret and one of which is public. This is a method with haiku where the *first reading*, *first layer*, is most readily available to the reader, but there are secrets and layers to move into, to tease and reward the good and the faithful.

Does Terrill challenge Bashō, the man many often think of as single-handedly creating haiku?

contemplating banana leaves
I close my eyes
and see dust motes

Bashō is a pen name that the most famous of haikai verse writers was finally known by: it means plantain leaves, or banana leaves. Bashō (1644 – 1694), was born Matsuo Kinsaku, and then renamed Matsuo Chūemon Munefusa, and he elevated *kado* (the way of poetry) into something inclusive and meaningful to a wider number of people, regardless of social background, through his hokku verses

and haibun prose. I believe Terrill embraces Bashō as the source of his creativity when composing modern haiku, and it's as Bashō would have wished, for the student to go his own interpretative way.

absinthe to ashes
the poem's under
my fingernails

Stewart Jones gets to the nub of his poetry, and it's through hard-living and hard-working on crafting haiku, and his edgy life experiences to draw upon, as surely as he draws on his cigarettes and drinking the artist's drink of choice, or at times, choice of alcoholic poison. But Stewart Jones is far more than a stereotyped view of a poet, he very much has a keen grip on life, with craftsmanship turning the vehicle of the word.

None of these poets shy away from life and its consequences, they keep it real for their readers.

The collection/anthology is made into short sequences or bursts, each author segues away from another author. It isn't until you turn to the credits that you find which poet wrote what verse, and what is refreshingly different, there are no long lists of publishing credits, as at the forefront of these writers' desires is the material for the reader alone.

Using aspects of linked haikai verses called renga or renku, the individual pieces also riff off each to create new angles and meanings for the readers.

From the opening verse, with change-meaning alchemy in-between signs, symbols and signifiers...

fooled
by its camouflage
crippled moon

as water
whiteness yanks the winter
down deep down

...we are brought deep down into the worlds of these poets.

These poets attempt to enter the tight cage of haiku, and what Johnson talked of, back in 1751:

"Imagination, a licentious and vagrant faculty, unsusceptible of limitations and impatient of restraint, has always endeavoured to baffle the logician, to perplex the confines of distinction, and burst the enclosures of regularity." Johnson (May 28, 1751)

Alan Summers
Japan Times award-winning writer for haiku and renku

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fooled
by its camouflage
crippled moon

as water
whiteness yanks the winter
down deep down

chemtrails . . .
two black jets
make love

coloring book
insouciance of the girl
with a scraped knee

by the edge of an edge of a sea a wound

spot of blood
on my jeans.
unnecessary moon



spring morning
birds sing despite
my punk rock

cops in front

in back

summer heat

autumn chill
the old man's
caress

snow, I'm piling up fast

she called for a shot of Narcan____^_spring morning



following models
of the moon on water

$$i \frac{\partial u}{\partial z} - \frac{\beta''}{2} \frac{\partial^2 u}{\partial t'^2} + \gamma |u|^2 u = 0$$

Holiday Inn
a waterfowl plunges headfirst
into the car park

rusted tools
on the wall
a plumber's day dream

waiting at the bar . . .
her martini
with bitters

moon waves
the proximity
of flesh

half drunk
cup of tea—
the cold skin
of a whore

morning comes
I flip the light switch
on again, off again

darkness,
stroking the faith
of your shadow

q

dad's passing . . .
I hope he brought
his sunglasses

absinthe to ashes
the poem's under
my fingernails

contemplating banana leaves
I close my eyes
and see dust motes

flesh & bones
editing last night
's chicken

Beside me
the weight of the world halved
by a mushroom.

shopping for oysters
i return
to find them dead

Д

deflated moon
strung-out clouds
on birdsong cushions

in a hole
through birdsong drips
bougainvillaea

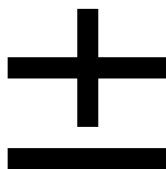
Chopin nocturne
and candlelight dinner
snoring old dog

peaks, troughs:
an enjambment
of gulls

road kill
gypsy stars
playing violins

strings and arrows
my assault
on Time

day this skin dragging me back



new shoes
the old ones knowing
circles of doubt

grasping
at prayer
moonrise

prefab silhouettes—
middle-class kids
in 'arrington jackets

overcoats
cover the piano
blues in C

cocaine

cocaine

cocaine

cocaine



moon rising:
dissociated flights
of damask dragons

way down
a bitter parabola
digging, d i gging

summer storm the scent of your cunt

into my mouth
sea urchins explode
and multiply

all is liquid
at some point
my excuses

æ

atomic sky
a crab follows a gutter
no nearer the ocean

irises bloom
in a world outside
a dream

crank of the lock
a dead dog
carried in the flow

not moving
moving
a fjord and a fjord and a fjord

broken spine
of a book from Santoka
nonchalantly pissing

facing a stone belly
the lump in my neck
dispatches a baby universe

Credits

Scott Terrill: as water; by the edge; snow; Holiday Inn; contemplating banana leaves; Beside me; shopping for oysters; in a hole; into my mouth; atomic sky; not moving; facing a stone belly.

Brendan Slater: fooled; spot of blood; autumn chill; she called; half drunk; darkness; day; grasping; prefab silhouettes; way down; summer storm; crank of the lock.

Colin Stewart Jones: following models; moon waves; absinthe to ashes; flesh & bones; deflated moon; peaks, troughs; road kill; strings and arrows; new shoes; cocaine; moon rising; all is liquid.

Michael Goglia: chemtrails; coloring book; spring morning; cops in front; rusted tools; waiting at the bar; morning comes; dad's passing; Chopin nocturne; overcoats; irises bloom; broken spine.

~~Four Virtual Haiku Poets~~

This collection brings together four unique talents representing Scotland, England, Australia, and the United States who present four distinct dialects, and showcase the many approaches, shapes, shades, and shadows that comprise Modern English Haiku. In the vernacular of America's Great Lakes Region . . . What we got here ain't no dime store jewelry. What we got here's a string of genuine pearls.

Ed Markowski
Auburn Hills, Michigan



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Poetry